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GENERAL AND COMPLETE DISARMAMENT

Letter dated 28 May 1996 from the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to resolution 50/80 B, entitled 'Development of good-neighbourly relations among Balkan States', adopted by the General Assembly on 12 December 1995.

On behalf of the European Union and of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe associated with it (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania) as well as of the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, I am pleased to provide you with the attached common reply concerning the resolution (see annex).

I would be grateful if you could have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly under item 71 of the provisional agenda.

(Signed) F. Paolo FULCI
Ambassador and
Permanent Representative

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ANNEX

European Union common reply to resolution 50/80 B on development of good-neighbourly relations among Balkan States

1. Since the beginning of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, the European Union (EU) has spared no effort to promote peaceful and lasting solutions. The Union has also been the principal contributor to the effort aimed at relieving the civilian population from its terrible suffering.

2. The Peace Agreement on Bosnia signed in Paris on 14 December 1995 and the Erdut Agreement on Eastern Slavonia have opened a real opportunity for the stabilization and the rehabilitation of the whole Balkan area. It is the strong belief of the States members of the European Union that new relations can be established among the Republics of the former Yugoslavia that could favour reconciliation. At the same time States members of the Union strongly support the establishment of improved relations among those and the other Balkan countries to foster social and economic development.

3. Mutual recognition among the countries of the former Yugoslavia would be a first step, to be followed by full normalization of diplomatic relations: we accordingly express appreciation for the recognition between Belgrade and Skopje, and earnestly hope for a similar outcome in relations between Belgrade and Zagreb.

4. Special attention should also be paid to the full respect of human rights, including those of minorities, which remain a cause for potential conflicts: EU attaches strong importance to the tasks attributed to the High Representative, the missions of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Council of Europe and the Working Group on Minorities of the Former International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, and believes that, within the existing international borders, minorities should be granted full respect for their cultural identity on the basis of the relevant international standards and, in particular, enjoy all rights that have been developed by the European and the international community as a basis for a solution of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia.

5. Another fundamental aspect for the stabilization of the Balkans is the mechanisms provided by the Peace Agreement to control and reduce the level of armaments, tremendously increased during recent years: the European Union fully supports relevant negotiations carried out under the auspices of OSCE, which envisage confidence- and security-building measures and measures for subregional and regional arms control. We welcome therefore the agreement signed on 26 January 1996 on the former and urge parties now engaged in subregional arms control (art. IV) negotiations to reach agreement on a balance at the lowest possible level of armaments by the 6 June deadline. We also urge all parties to participate in article V (regional balance) negotiations due to start immediately afterwards. Furthermore, on 26 February 1996, the European Union adopted a common position that aims at promoting restraint on the part of exporting countries so as to achieve balanced and stable defence force levels at

the lowest numbers consistent with the parties' respective security and the need to avoid an arms race in the region.

6. In the entire context, the European Union has a major role to play in the fields of supporting the rehabilitation of civil society and in the establishment of normal relations among all the States and peoples of the Balkans, as well as in the field of economic reconstruction in the areas of the former Yugoslavia that were destroyed by the war. Reconstruction should have a strong focus on promoting the conditions for the return of refugees, consolidating democracy and developing free-market economies.

Reconstruction assistance can be complemented, inter alia, by the development of regional infrastructures with a view to favouring a network of cooperative interrelations in the region.

The process launched at Royaumont at the initiative of the European Union calls for a continuing joint effort to achieve lasting stability and good-neighbourly relations in South-East Europe.

7. The Union envisages a regional approach, a goal of which would be to develop closer relations between these countries and the European Union. The objectives of EU include the establishment and reinforcement of democratic institutions, the reinforcement of civil society and the support for transition to market economies.

8. The European Union will seek to establish, as soon as conditions permit, a long-term relationship with the countries of the region with which no association agreement has yet been reached. Agreements with these countries will be formulated in the framework of a regional approach aimed also at fostering the establishment of open and cooperative relations among these countries and their closest neighbours.

9. All the agreements will depend on clear political and economic conditionality with reference to respect of human rights, minority rights, democratic institutions, political and economic reform, readiness to establish open and cooperative relations between these countries, full compliance with the terms of the Peace Agreement, including the Agreement on Regional Stabilization (annex 1B) and, with regard to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), the granting of a large degree of autonomy within it to Kosovo.

10. It is our intention to proceed along this path, taking into due account the position of the other countries of the area, namely, Albania, Bulgaria and Romania, which already enjoy contractual links with EU. The willingness of the countries concerned to engage in regional reconciliation and to speed up economic and political reforms will be determining factors in their future relations with the European Union.

11. A European perspective for the Balkans is therefore the best chance we have to heal the wounds of these years and fully reintegrate the area in the life of Europe, its political and social standards.

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